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ABSTRACT

A study examined the background, methods, and results of the pilot year of Vermont's Writing Assessment program. Students and teachers from 46 Vermont schools were invited to participate in the 1990-91 pilot year of portfolio assessment. Students in grades 4 and 8 chose samples of their best writing from the school year. Each portfolio was evaluated by two teachers from schools other than the writer's own. Students' best pieces were evaluated separately from the portfolios. All students in the writing program also completed a Uniform Writing Assessment task. Five "dimensions" of writing were developed into assessment criteria: purpose, organization, details, voice/tone, and usage/mechanics/grammar. Results indicated that: (1) many Vermont students wrote well; (2) many students could write better; (3) fourth graders generally performed best on the "best piece"; and (4) eighth graders did best on the uniform assessment. Correlations between eighth-grade students' responses to general information questions and levels of writing performance demonstrated the negative impact of television, the positive impact of reading, the effectiveness of writing across the curriculum, and teaching writing as a process. Observations and evaluations by teachers involved in the pilot year can be summed up with one teacher's comment made in the final phase of the project, "I've been meaning to tell you--it hasn't been that bad!" (Contains 6 unnumbered tables of data and 10 unnumbered bar graphs of data. Appendixes present lists of committee members, schools, writing resource centers, and consultants; general information questions; the uniform writing assessment; and editing suggestions.) (RS)

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ED 377 520

"This Is My Best"

Vermont's Writing Assessment Program

Pilot Year
1990-91

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The Parrot Who Couldn't Talk

One regular Monday in the jungle all the animals were talking about the parrot that would be born that next week. It was an exciting occasion because it was the king and Queen of the jungle that would have the new born parrot. So while everyone was talking back at the palace, the Queen was giving birth to her baby parrot. When the parrot was born the king orderd his monkey servant to tell all the animals that his son had been born. When the monkey got to where the animals were, he gave them the message that the parrot had been born. The animals were so excited that they forgot what they were excited about. So the other servant of the king blew his whistle and said,

"You animals must calm down and redize that the Queen had her baby parrot!" When all the animals had calmed down the elephant led them to the king and Queen. When they got there everyone wanted to see the parrot at once.

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So the king said, "We can't make the Queen tired. So I suggest that you form a line, and everyone will get to see the parrot for exactly 10 minutes." So everyone got in a line. The last family was the parrot family. Everyone had things for the baby like toys, clothes, and other things like diapers bibs, baby mushed bird seed, and bottle Finally about three days after the baby parrot was born the last family which was the parrot family got to see the parrot. When the father of the parrot family said hello to the baby prince he thought it was odd that the parrot didnt say anything back because parrots learn how to talk when they are about a day old (at least these do. So the father of the parrots talked to the king and Queen. Ofcourse they were worried too. The Queen was especially worried because she had remembered that her sister couldn't talk when she was born and she never talked at all Finally after the three adults were done talking they had come up with a solution to make the baby parrot talk again.

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"This Is My Best"

The Report of Vermont's Writing Assessment Program

Pilot Year
1990-91

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I. Introduction

This report presents the background, methods and results of a project that is, so far, unique in the nation. During the 1990-91 school year, educators from across Vermont joined in an effort to assess how well our students are learning to write, by evaluating portfolios of writing samples that the students, themselves, put together.

Students and teachers from 46 Vermont schools were invited to participate in this pilot year of portfolio assessment. These "sample schools" were randomly selected to represent a demographic cross-section of Vermont — a true statistical sample. In addition, 98 schools that asked to participate became pilot-year "volunteers." Although the work from these schools was not formally assessed

Portfolio assessment draws from and feeds back into classroom work — and it offers a chance to measure directly each student's real performance in writing.

and is not reported here, the volunteer schools were extremely valuable in helping us refine the Vermont Writing Assessment Program, and they received a great deal of experience in return.

In assembling their portfolios, students in grades four and eight chose samples of their best writing from the school year, following category guidelines that are outlined in Section III of this report. Teachers from the sample schools were specially trained to assess the portfolios, measuring each piece against performance standards that were based on writing by Vermont students. Each portfolio was evaluated by two teachers from schools other than the writer's own. Each student also submitted a "Best Piece," which was assessed separately from the portfolio. In addition, all students in the pilot program performed a Uniform Writing Assessment task: During a 90-minute period in the classroom, each student developed, drafted and completed an essay in response to a writing "prompt." All conditions of the uniform assessment, including the prompt, were essentially the same for all writers in both grades.

The Purpose Is to Learn

The goals of this effort are to assess how well our students write, and to improve writing in our schools.

This is a timely experiment. As Vermonters spend an increasing amount of money on education, we want to know how well our dollars are working. We have looked for alternatives to standardized testing, which operates apart from classroom instruction. Portfolio assessment draws from and feeds back into classroom work — and it offers a chance to measure directly each student's real performance in writing, in a way that honors the individual yet is standard and fair in application.

Vermont's education community and the Department of Education plan to broaden the fourth and eighth grade portfolio assessment program, in both writing and mathematics, to all Vermont schools beginning in the 1991-92 school year. With this in mind, the overall aim of this report is to present what has been learned from this pilot year, and to summarize the participants' recommendations for the future.

A Collaborative Design

Vermont's portfolio-based approach to writing assessment has been in continual development since the Writing Assessment Leadership Committee first met in spring 1989. During the pilot year, every teacher participating in the project had opportunities to contribute to its design. In all, the Writing Assessment Leadership Committee, whose members include seven teachers and two representatives of the Vermont Department of Education, received help and advice from more than 500 other Vermont educators, along with a number of educators from across the United States.

Outline of this Report

This report is divided into six sections. The first three introduce and outline the assessment program; the latter three present the assessment results of the pilot year.

This Introduction is followed by *Section II, Why Writing Is Important; the Assessment Criteria.* This sets out our shared values in this field, it introduces the Writing Assessment Program's approach to analyzing and measuring performance, and it shows — using examples drawn from the portfolios — how the assessment criteria relate to the elements of good writing.

Section III, Components of the Portfolio; the Uniform Writing Assessment; Evaluating the Work, describes what was in each student's portfolio. It then outlines the Uniform Writing Assessment process, and summarizes the manner in which all the students' writing was evaluated.

Section IV, Performance on Paper: The Assessment Results, presents in both narrative and graphic form the findings of the pilot year.

During the pilot year, every teacher participating in the project had opportunities to contribute to its design.

Section V, Illuminations: Some Findings of the Questionnaire, relates the most informative and interesting relationships between the results of a questionnaire the students completed, and the findings of the writing assessment.

Finally, *Section VI, Assessing the Assessment,* offers observations and evaluations by the teachers who led working groups in the assessment. Along with reflecting on how the pilot year process worked, this section contains suggestions for the future of the Writing Assessment Program.

Two important components of the writing assessment that are not part of this report will be implemented next year: an evaluation of each school's writing program, and anecdotal observations about the students' writing.

II. Why Writing Is Important; the Assessment Criteria

Why Write?

"It isn't always what you say, it's how you say it," is one way to look at writing instruction. Another is to claim that content is all that matters — let the writer express him/herself and hang grammar and spelling. The plan for Vermont's writing assessment is to engage teachers in a dialogue about these issues, and to emphasize that "writing instruction" is not just the English teacher's job.

When words are used as a mathematician uses numbers, to reach a solution or solve a problem, writing becomes an essential tool in learning, a primary skill. By focusing on students' writing portfolios, Vermont's assessment program has been designed to advance an acceptance of writing as a *tool in learning*, not just as a means of reporting information.

Beyond the K-12 reasons for writing well are the demands of institutions of higher learning, and the needs of our own workplace. Fully half the jobs in this country now demand literacy skills, and advancement in any of these positions is almost inevitably affected by one's ability to communicate on paper.

The commitment of the Vermont teachers who agreed to help design this program was to provide criteria by which students' own work would be assessed, along with a reasonable way to assemble such work in portfolios. In suggesting the minimum contents for student portfolios, the Writing Assessment Leadership Committee made a concerted effort to encourage writing across the curriculum.

The best way to learn to write is to write. Teachers can foster good writing by asking their students to write. These same teachers should write, too. But is it fair to expect teachers whose subject is not English to be writing critics, as well? If they are not comfortable noting technical or stylistic matters, let the non-English teachers review the content of their students' writing, leaving matters of linguistic precision to the English class.

It would be wonderful if the portfolio of a fourth or eighth grade student reflected work from previous years, but no one expects Vermont schools immediately to accommodate this. If writing portfolios are a good idea, an assessment program will be only one small part of what motivates their existence. Such a program will stay in place for its demonstrated value in encouraging dialogue, across the state, on what we value in writing. If that weren't so important, we could say the writing portfolio is "just a passing fad" and be done with it.

But it's more than that. Even with computers helping us to reduce spelling and grammatical errors, we haven't yet found a better tool than just plain writing to give us, and others, such extensive access to our thoughts and feelings. The best way to learn writing is to write — and that's the only way to make a writing portfolio.

What Do the Criteria Mean, and How Were They Selected?

We all have our own idea of what good writing is. Vermont's Writing Assessment Program proposed to look at five important dimensions of writing:

— "Purpose,"
— "Organization,"
— "Details,"
— "Voice/Tone," and
— "Usage/Mechanics/Grammar."

A five-part system such as this makes possible an analytic view of each student's abilities as a writer, while discouraging assessments as simplistic as "good" or "bad." When students look at their writing with these five dimensions in mind, they may come to recognize their own strengths as writers, and the areas where their writing needs improvement. For a full presentation of the values assigned to each performance level in each dimension, please review the *Analytic Assessment Guide* that is included in this section.

Refining the Criteria

During the program's 18 months of preliminary design sessions, the Writing Assessment Leadership Committee considered dozens of criteria that it finally eliminated as vague or impractical. "Sentence variety" was among these suggestions, eventually dropped in the belief that it is encompassed by "Organization" and "Voice/Tone." "Clarity" might serve as a criterion, but like "good writing," clarity has many components — so Purpose and Organization were nominated as criteria that might encompass clarity.

The Writing Assessment Leadership Committee continued its work, in close contact with pilot school teachers throughout the year, to refine and clarify these components of good writing. For example, at the start of the pilot year, one of the questions proposed as a criterion for the program was: "Is the organization suitable to the writer's purpose?" In reviewing samples of student writing, pilot year teachers found themselves unsure whether they were looking for evidence of satisfactory organization, or for clarity of purpose. "This is a double-barreled criterion!" one teacher exclaimed. "I suggest we limit each of these evaluative questions to one component of writing." The Committee took that advice to heart and revised the list of criteria.

Vermont's assessment program has been designed to advance an acceptance of writing as a tool in learning, not just as a means of reporting information.

No one claims that the five dimensions now used in the program are all there is to good writing. "Originality," "Thoughtfulness," and "Penmanship" are among several criteria that the Writing Assessment Leadership Committee chose not to address. The five criteria now in place represent an attempt to define important skills that students *can* develop, not capacities that are either superficial or a measure of "talent."

Considerable discussion might be given to which of the five criteria are most important. Can a writer ignore any one or two of these criteria, and still produce credible writing? A piece that is poorly organized, for instance, may still communicate with a strong

sense of purpose or contain a commendable level of detail.

By suggesting five criteria for Vermont's writing assessment, the Writing Committee hopes to emphasize that these are some parts, perhaps the major components, of what goes into a successful piece of writing. The Committee also hopes that teachers and students will recognize that, even when a piece is assessed low in any of these dimensions, it may well have strengths in other aspects of its composition.

The Levels of Performance

The Writing Committee worked hard to develop language that would represent a reasonable range of student achievement without seeming excessively value-laden. A student whose writing is assessed as "rarely" well-organized, for instance, may feel more positive about that than if his/her writing were found "unacceptable" in organization. And so the levels of performance — "**Rarely**," "**Sometimes**," "**Frequently**," and "**Extensively**" — are expressed as indicators of frequency rather than ratings of quality.

Benchmarks: The Starting Points

To work toward a fair and consistent assessment of each student's writing, a collection of **benchmarks** — pieces of student writing that are judged as exemplars for each level of performance, in each category — was assembled for both grade four and grade eight, and provided as part of each teacher/assessor's training. Copies of these benchmark collections are included in the front and back cover-pockets of this report.

The benchmarks were chosen in April 1991, during a two-day process that involved committees of 10 teachers from each grade, and approximately 1,400 student portfolios. The teachers tagged, distributed, discussed and finally selected benchmarks whose performance levels were carefully, repeatedly discussed.

Each of the following five pages uses examples drawn from the benchmark collections, to help illustrate how the five dimensions for assessment were applied.

Purpose

The Writing Assessment Leadership Committee defined Purpose as "the degree to which the piece: establishes and maintains a clear purpose; demonstrates an awareness of audience and task; exhibits clarity of ideas." A piece of writing (or a portfolio) that rarely exhibits strength of purpose, "lacks clarity of ideas; demonstrates minimal awareness of audience and task; does not establish a clear purpose."

Here is a piece of writing by a fourth grade student that was chosen as a "Rarely" benchmark in the Purpose category:

When My Dad Went to the Hostapil

the date was Dec. 8, 1990 I HATED!! Michelyne, Dannielle, and I stayed at the Camp's house over night. It was O.K. Michelyne cooked dinner (don't tell this but it was gross!!) otherwise it was good!! On the other hand dad was on his way to the hostapil, it took 2 hours to get there.

In assessing the purpose of this piece, the reader determines which of the Purpose descriptors most closely matches it. Because "When My Dad Went to the Hostapil" lacks clarity of ideas, demonstrates a minimal awareness of audience and task, and fails to establish a clear purpose, it has been assessed as "Rarely" in Purpose. At the same time, someone assessing this piece might notice that the Usage/Mechanics/Grammar, although far from perfect, are in the "Sometimes-Frequently" range for a fourth grade student, especially given the proper use of an apostrophe to indicate a possessive noun, and the correct use of commas in series.

Writing that falls into the "Extensively" range in Purpose "exhibits ideas that are developed in depth; demonstrates a clear understanding of audience and task, and establishes and maintains a clear purpose." Here is a poem, written by an eighth grade student, that the Benchmarking Committee nominated as a strong example of writing with extensive purpose:

The Drifter
He walks down the lonely street
Hunger building in his stomach
Something shines beneath the dirt
He bends down
Reaches for it, A quarter
He drops it into his pocket
Squats down in his home
On the street
He sleeps
Awaken by sirens
He stands up
Runs
Far away
finds another town
Anothers lonely street
his new home.

Assessing the Usage/Mechanics/Grammar of this piece might be a tricky exercise, producing discrepant results among readers. Discussion will continue on how to assess poetry using the program's five dimensions, and whether matters of Usage/Mechanics/Grammar in poetry rely on the author's consistency or on established conventions.

Organization

Organization is "the degree to which the writing illustrates unity and coherence." A piece that rarely exhibits this quality may "have skeletal organization with brevity; lack introduction and/or conclusion; have thought patterns that are difficult, if not impossible, to follow; exhibit serious errors in organization."

The following piece by an eighth grade student was assessed as a "Rarely" in Organization. But as poorly organized as the writing is, the reader will have a hard time ignoring the strong sense of expression, or "Voice/Tone," that emerges:

Dream Come True

The Hike, oh what a wonderful thing, Sore Feet, Sore legs, Sore Back, Blisters, mud & Nature. Being in the Nature brings the man out in me, I Feel like I should have an axe in one hand and a beer in the other. Man, I can't write about this horrible stuff. The only time I have axe in my hand is in my Nightmares. The truth is, I wish I had a Guitar in one hand and a concert ticket in the other. On the way up that stupid mountain I was wishing I had played sick so I wouldn't have had to come on this trip, Than at the top it was wonderful, Oh don't get me wrong, I still hate the woods because it's dirty, smelly and disgusting.

So on the top I was alone, by myself, when along skips Amy (a little blond girl) just to say Hi. Then it happened OH Dear GOD it happened All the girls in my class, all around me. Was it my charm or my beauty or my skillfulness on my guitar. At the time I didn't care for I was in 7th heaven. But now I wonder why the came over. Well I'm just glad it happen

Assessing this piece across all five dimensions of the program, we might determine that, while it is, indeed, a "Rarely" in Organization, it is a "Sometimes" in Purpose because it "exhibits rudimentary development of ideas; demonstrates some awareness of audience and task; and attempts to establish a purpose." For Detail, the piece might be assessed as a "Frequently" because "details are elaborated and appropriate" — and for Voice/Tone, a reader might judge the piece an "Extensively" ("tone enhances personal expression; distinctive voice evident"). For Usage/Mechanics/Grammar, the assessment would likely be "Sometimes," because "multiple errors and/or patterns of errors are evident."

Details

Detail is "the degree to which the details are appropriate for the writer's purpose and support the main point(s) of the writing." Here are two short essays by eighth grade students, the first assessed as a "Rarely" in Detail ("details are random, inappropriate, or barely apparent"), the second assessed a "Sometimes" ("details lack elaboration or are repetitious"):

War In the Gulf

I think the war in the gulf was the only choice possible. Saddam Hussein's actions lead me to believe that he wasn't going to stop with Kuwait, but all the other Arab Nations were in danger.

The Attic

As I walked in the attic, It smells like it's all dusty and has been abandoned for years. The sight is like a very foggy night. The furniture is coverd up with white sheets. I looked out the window, and I saw the back yard, and a big tree with birds in it. When I walked across the floor it crackled.

When I touched the wall, it was warm and stuffy.

"The Attic" has prompted considerable debate. Isn't it better described by the phrase assigned to a "Frequently" in Detail: "details are elaborated and appropriate"? Yet the Benchmarking Committee held fast to its judgment, adding that the details in "The Attic" seem gratuitous, as if the piece were a response to an assignment that challenged students to involve all five senses in a short piece of writing. Any one of the details is commendable, but their cumulative effect is repetitious.

Voice/Tone

Voice/Tone is "the degree to which the writer's response reflects personal investment and expression." Members of the Benchmarking Committee had difficulty finding a strong sense of voice in research papers, and in other writing that is in the third person. "I Know Kids Should Pick Their Own Bedtimes" is an essay by a fourth grade student that was assessed as a "Frequently" in Voice/Tone because "the tone is appropriate for the writer's purpose," and there is "evidence of voice" in the pie

I Know Kids Should Pick Their Own Bedtimes

I know kids should pick their own bedtimes. WHY? Because I am a kid. We know how much sleep we need. We know how much time it will take to get our homework done. Besides that it is not fair because your parents get to watch T.V. T.V. is sometimes learning. And if you are not tired you just lay in bed and do nothing when you could be reading. And if you have a younger sister or brother they should go to bed earlier than you should. I know kids should pick their own bedtimes. By the age of 8 we are old enough to make all our own decisions.

Compare this piece with the following excerpt from an eighth grader's research paper that was judged a "Rarely" in Voice/Tone ("tone absent or inappropriate for writer's purpose; little or no voice evident"):

Booker T. Washington

Booker T. Washington was born April 5, 1856, in franklin county, Va. His mother, Jane Burroughs, was a plantation cook. His father was an unknown whiteman. When Booker was only a child, he swept yards and brought water to the slaves working in the fields. When he was freed by the civil war, he went with his mother to Malden, West Virginia, to join Washington Ferguson, whom she had married during the war. Also, Booker T. Washington had two brothers, John and James, and a sister, Amanda.

Although "Booker T. Washington" is well-organized and grammatically sound, the author seems to have paraphrased information from a published text, making little effort to put a sense of life or enthusiasm into the words.

Usage/Mechanics/Grammar

Usage/Mechanics/Grammar is "the degree to which the writer's response exhibits correct: usage (tense formation, agreement, word choice); mechanics (spelling, capitalization, punctuation); grammar; sentences — as appropriate to the piece and grade level." For the purpose of Vermont's writing assessment, the Writing Committee decided that a single type of error, repeated throughout a piece of writing or occurring extensively in the portfolio, should not be sufficient reason for a "Rarely," in which "errors are frequent and severe."

Here is a piece by an eighth grade student that has been selected as a "Rarely" in Usage/Mechanics/Grammar:

Vermont

The thing I love about Vermont is the summers sunny warm summers. THE AIR IS FREASH I love the birds when I hike the veiws are great even when you are skiing I love Vermont True its boring but still there is so many places to explore the woods are endless Camping and biking are awsome there is so many things to do in Vermont the only thing when walking through the feilds watch for meadow muffins farming is neat I love to sugar this state has so much to ofer but people just dont see it Vermont has every thing to ofer it is awsome you walk for five minuts and you are in the middel of nowhere the animals in Vermont is great because were ever you are there are animals right there

Here is an excerpt from "The Pelicans," written by an eighth grade student and assessed as a "Sometimes" in Usage/Mechanics/Grammar because "multiple errors and/or patterns of errors are evident":

The Pelicans

The sun was up as I looked out the window to see a squardren of pelicans on their usual patrol. They crused just above the surface of the water as the leader pealed of and the others falowed one by one in perfect precistion. It was butifull to se them fly. They were costum aircraft built perfectly for their purpose. They were made for catching fish and manuvering precisely.

The leader led them in a strait line up, and at the top of his climbe dove strait into the water. The others followed and the result was a bombardment of pelicans plunging strait into the water. The whole thing looked like a well-reheresed ack being preformed by masters of the theater.

Subjectivity: A Final Word

When the sample school teachers began preparing to assess the Best Pieces and Portfolios, the benchmark pieces served as a starting point for coming to agreement on a common standard. At that stage, substantial debate arose over the assessments given to two or three benchmark pieces. But as long as these pieces are seen as a starting point for focusing on the criteria — as long as they are used to foster a discussion of the standards by which we assess student writing — minor disagreements over their "rating" are healthy.

No matter the words we use, no matter the criteria by which we assess writing, no matter how skillfully our teachers review the work in question, this is a human endeavor and one that involves judgments. One of our goals, as this program evolves, is to reduce the possibility that one teacher's response will differ substantially from the responses of other teachers.

Vermont Writing Assessment

Analytic Assessment Guide

	Purpose	Organization	Details	Voice/Tone	Usage, Mechanics Grammar
In Assessing, Consider...	the degree to which the writer's response • establishes and maintains a clear purpose • demonstrates an awareness of audience and task • exhibits clarity of ideas	the degree to which the writer's response illustrates • unity • coherence	the degree to which the details are appropriate for the writer's purpose and support the main point(s) of the writer's response	the degree to which the writer's response reflects personal investment and expression	the degree to which the writer's response exhibits correct • usage (e.g., tense formation, agreement, word choice) • mechanics —spelling, capitalization, punctuation • grammar • sentences as appropriate to the piece and grade level
Extensively	• Establishes and maintains a clear purpose • Demonstrates a clear understanding of audience and task • Exhibits ideas that are developed in depth	• Organized from beginning to end • Logical progression of ideas • Clear focus • Fluent, cohesive	• Details are effective, vivid, explicit, and/or pertinent	• Distinctive voice evident • Tone enhances personal expression	• Few, if any, errors are evident relative to length and complexity
Frequently	• Establishes a purpose • Demonstrates an awareness of audience and task • Develops ideas, but they may be limited in depth	• Organized but may have minor lapses in unity or coherence	• Details are elaborated and appropriate	• Evidence of voice • Tone appropriate for writer's purpose	• Some errors are present
Sometimes	• Attempts to establish a purpose • Demonstrates some awareness of audience and task • Exhibits rudimentary development of ideas	• Inconsistencies in unity and/or coherence • Poor transitions • Shift in point of view	• Details lack elaboration or are repetitious	• Evidence of beginning sense of voice • Some evidence of appropriate tone	• Multiple errors and/or patterns of errors are evident
Rarely	• Does not establish a clear purpose • Demonstrates minimal awareness of audience and task • Lacks clarity of ideas	• Serious errors in organization • Thought patterns difficult, if not impossible, to follow • Lacks introduction and/or conclusion • Skeletal organization with brevity	• Details are random, inappropriate, or barely apparent	• Little or no voice evident • Tone absent or inappropriate for writer's purpose	• Errors are frequent and severe
	Non-Scorable (NS) • is illegible: i.e., includes so many undecipherable words that no sense can be made of the response, — or — • is incoherent: i.e., words are legible but syntax is so garbled that response makes no sense, — or — • is a blank paper.				

III. Components of the Portfolio; the Uniform Writing Assessment; Evaluating the Work

For the purpose of this assessment program, a writing portfolio is a folder containing written pieces chosen, dated and assembled by the student, in several categories. With guidance from the classroom teacher, each fourth and eighth grade student put together a portfolio that included:

1. A Table of Contents.

2. A "Best Piece." This is the piece that the student feels represents his or her best work as a writer. It may come from any class, and it may or may not address an academic subject. Each Best Piece was assessed separately from the portfolio, but using the same criteria. The Best Piece was made part of the assessment in the expectation that it would help depict what students value in their own writing, that the process of its choosing would encourage students to reflect on their work, and that the evaluation of this piece would be especially helpful to the student writer. The Best Piece assessments also indicate the range of "best work" that is being written at grades four and eight.

3. A Letter. Written by the student to the reviewers, this explains the choice of the Best Piece, and the process of its composition.

4. A poem, short story, play or personal narration.

5. A personal response to a cultural, media or sports exhibit or event; or to a book, current issue, math problem or scientific phenomenon.

6. Fourth Grade: A prose piece from any curriculum area that is not English or Language Arts. **Eighth grade: Three prose pieces** from any curriculum areas that are not English or Language Arts.

The portfolio components were designed to ensure that the writing came from *across the school curriculum,* and across types of writing. This reflects an overall aim of the program: that the writing stimulated by portfolio assessment will enhance learning in all phases of the curriculum, in all grades of all our schools.

Writing to a 'Prompt'

The Uniform Writing Assessment offered each student a chance to display his/her writing skills under a universally standard condition.

The portfolio components were designed to ensure that the writing came from across the school curriculum, and across types of writing. This reflects an overall aim of the program...

In a classroom, students in both grades were given 90 minutes to develop, draft and polish an essay that responded to the same prompt, or writing challenge:

"Most people have strong feelings about something that happened to them in the past. Think about a time when you felt happy, scared, surprised, or proud.

"Tell about this time so that the reader will understand what happened, who was involved, how the experience made you feel, and why it was important to you."

Several, optional "Prewriting Suggestions" were offered as questions, such as, "Where did this experience take place?" "How did this experience make you feel?" Students were given as much scrap paper as they needed, and were encouraged to map, outline or organize their essay in any way they wished. Use of a dictionary and thesaurus was encouraged.

The task, then, was to compose a rough draft, apply to it the several "Editing Suggestions" that were also provided (samples: "Have I chosen the best words to express my ideas?" "Are my sentences clear and complete?"), and then write a final draft for submission at the end of the 90 minutes.

When the assessments were farther than one level apart, the two teachers negotiated what the final assessment rating should be.

Evaluating the Work

To assess the portfolios, teachers from grades four and eight of the sample schools spent two days working together in May. After being introduced to the writing benchmarks and trained in assessment, the teachers were assigned to tables where stacks of portfolios and Best Pieces awaited their evaluation.

Each portfolio and Best Piece was assessed by two teachers. When both teachers assigned the same performance level in a given category, that became the assessment. When two adjacent levels — such as "Sometimes" and "Frequently" — were assigned, an assessment between those two levels was recorded (see Section IV). When the assessments were farther than one level apart, the two teachers discussed their ratings, often in the presence of the table leader, before deciding what the final assessment rating should be.

The prompted Uniform Writing pieces were evaluated by the Department of Education's consultant in this project, Advanced Systems in Measurement and Evaluation of Dover, New Hampshire. With assistance from Vermont teachers who had assessed portfolios and Best Pieces, the consultant's professional readers applied the same standards that were used for the portfolio assessment.

IV. Performance on Paper: The Assessment Results

Each portfolio, best piece and uniform assessment essay was reviewed and assessed independently by two readers. The tables and graphs that follow present the results of these assessments, for both grades four and eight.

On this page, each table covers one type of submission — Portfolio, Best Piece or Uniform Assessment. The vertical columns

Assessment Results: An Overview

P — Purpose
O — Organization
D — Details
V — Voice/Tone
G — Usage, Mechanics, Grammar

Grade 4

	Best Piece					Portfolio					Uniform Assessment				
	P	O	D	V	G	P	O	D	V	G	P	O	D	V	G
Extensively	9	6	4	5	8	4	3	2	2	3	5	3	4	4	5
•	17	17	14	13	19	9	10	5	7	10	8	7	6	5	8
Frequently	28	28	21	19	32	28	26	18	17	32	32	29	22	25	39
•	25	26	31	28	20	30	31	35	29	25	22	23	24	27	23
Sometimes	16	15	23	23	14	23	23	34	36	21	22	27	36	29	15
•	5	7	6	11	6	4	7	5	8	8	6	7	5	7	5
Rarely	1	2	1	2	2	-	1	1	1	2	5	5	5	4	5

Because percentages have been rounded, totals do not always equal 100.

Grade 8

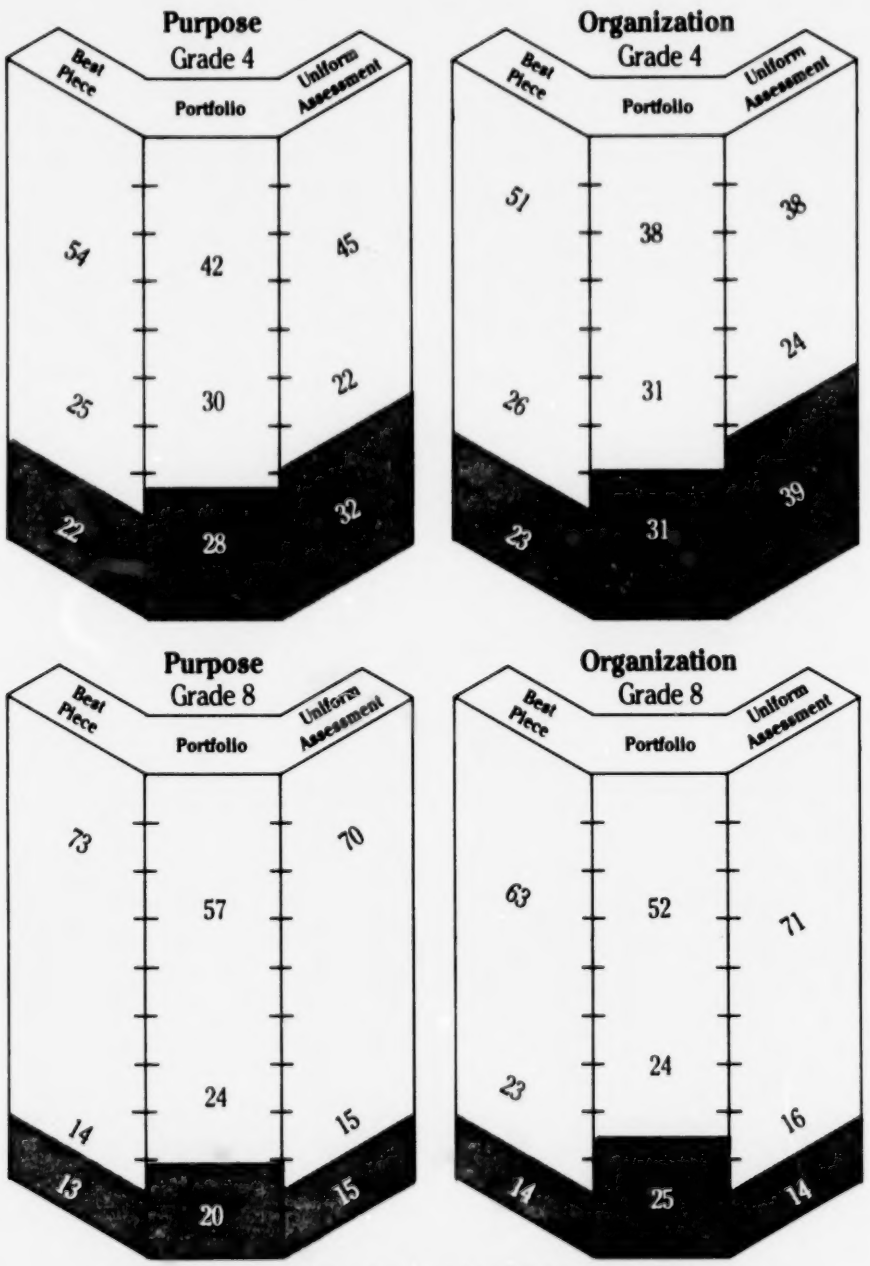
	Best Piece					Portfolio					Uniform Assessment				
	P	O	D	V	G	P	O	D	V	G	P	O	D	V	G
Extensively	16	10	10	13	12	6	6	5	7	6	17	16	19	14	20
•	23	24	22	22	17	15	12	11	14	11	16	16	17	14	17
Frequently	34	29	22	22	33	35	34	28	23	30	38	39	37	34	40
•	14	23	22	22	20	24	24	22	26	26	15	16	14	18	13
Sometimes	12	12	18	15	14	17	22	28	23	23	12	10	11	16	7
•	1	2	4	6	2	2	3	5	6	4	2	2	2	2	2
Rarely	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	2	-	-	1

show the percentage of students who performed at the "Rarely," "Sometimes," "Frequently" and "Extensively" levels in each dimension: Purpose, Organization, Details, Voice/Tone, and Usage/Mechanics/Grammar.

There are, also, asterisks marking "in-between" levels of assessment — between, for example, "Sometimes" and "Frequently." These show the percentage of students whose submission received adjacent assessments, with one reader assigning the lower level and the other assigning the higher.

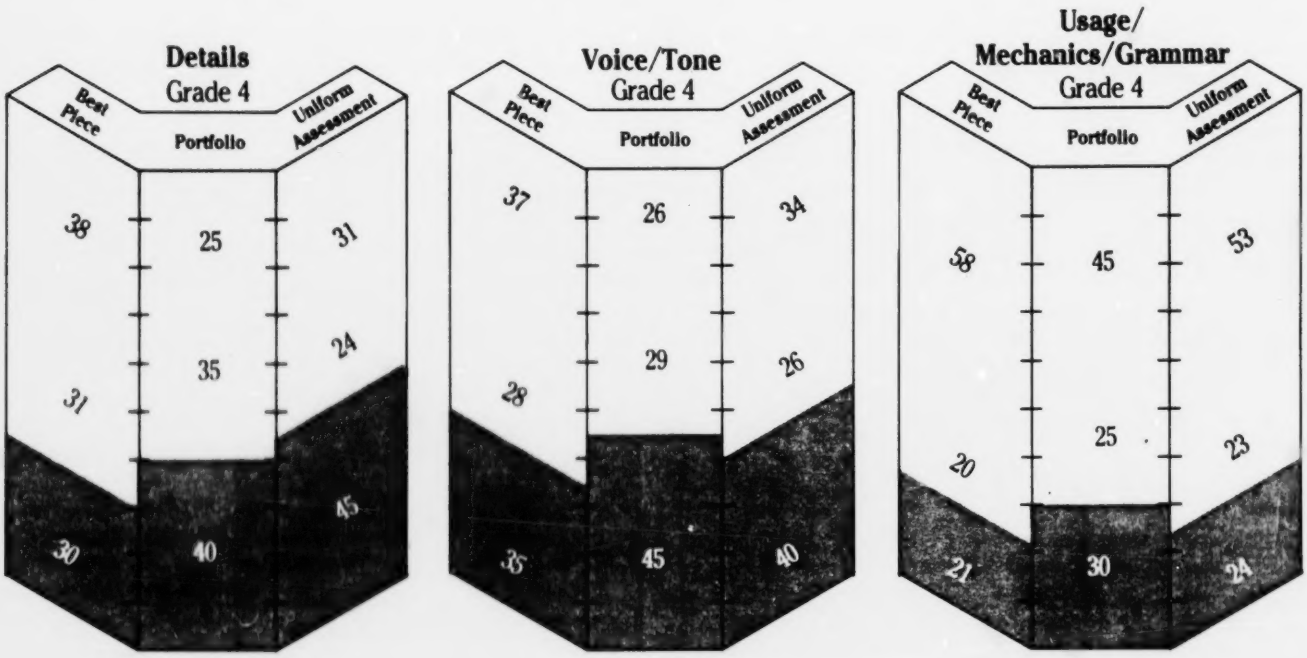
The bar graphs that follow group the results by criterion — showing, for example, how eighth graders performed on Purpose in the Portfolio, Best Piece, and Uniform Assessment. Here, the results are simplified: The bar graphs show the percentage of students whose work was assessed in the low range (from "Rarely" through "Sometimes"); those who were assessed at the midpoint, (the asterisk between "Sometimes" and "Frequently"); and those who were assessed in the high range ("Frequently" through "Extensively").

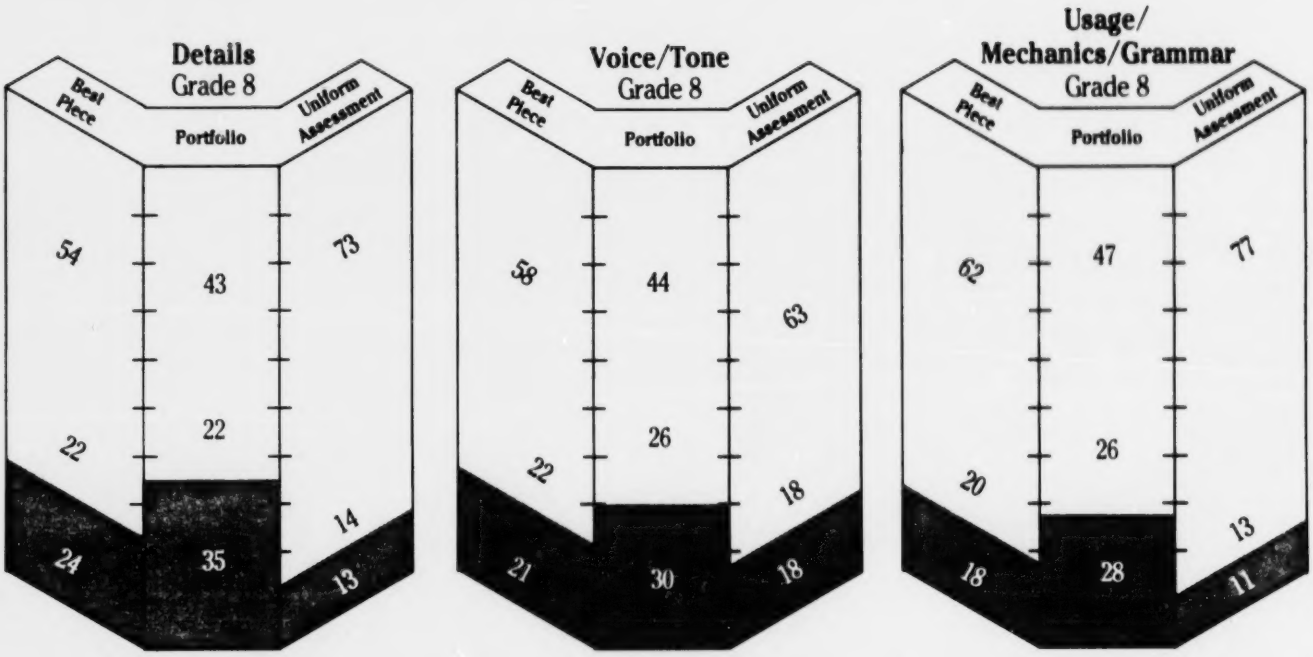
Assessment Results, by Categories



Because percentages have been rounded, totals do not always equal 100.

% at Frequently or above % at Midpoint % at Sometimes or below





Because percentages have been rounded, totals do not always equal 100.

% at Frequently or above

% at Midpoint

% at Sometimes or below

Some General Observations

Overall, these assessments point toward two conclusions:

— Many Vermont students write well. Often, they write very well.

— Many Vermont students could write better. Though these results are generally very encouraging, more students are in the lower ranges than we should be satisfied to see.

Few students were assessed at the absolute bottom of the scale. Only in the grade four Uniform Assessment do the "Rarely" findings rise as high as 5 percent. But there are, especially in grade four, sizeable percentages in the "Sometimes" range, which is still below the midpoint. On both the Portfolio and the Uniform Assessment tables, as many as 45 percent of fourth graders fall below the midpoint.

Most students in both grades are assessed around the center of the scale. This suggests that most students are writing at an acceptable level, but one basic goal of the Writing Assessment Program is to improve writing at all levels, in all areas, and we note that there is plenty of room for progress.

Few students were assessed at the bottom of the scale...But there are, especially in grade 4, sizeable percentages...below the midpoint.

That said, there is much in these assessments to applaud.

One striking feature is the improvement noted between grades four and eight. The scores in the upper grade are significantly higher, with impressive numbers at the upper end of the scale. Note, especially, that the "Extensively" findings for the Uniform Assessment have risen from a fourth grade range of 3-5 percent to an eighth grade range of 14-20 percent.

This across-the-board improvement in skills between grades four and eight suggests strongly that Vermont's writing instruction is effective. In grade four, an average of 35 percent of students scored above the midpoint in Portfolio, 48 percent in Best Piece, and 40 percent in the Uniform Assessment. In grade eight, these figures rose to 49 percent above the midpoint in Portfolio, 62 percent in Best Piece, and 71 percent in Uniform Assessment.

In both grades, the ratings given the Uniform Assessments by professional readers outside Vermont, using the Vermont standards, run close to those given by Vermont teachers for the Portfolios and Best Pieces. This suggests that the assessment system developed by Vermont educators worked well, and consistently, in its first use.

Another inference that may be drawn from the Uniform Assessment results is that by eighth grade, students respond quite effectively when asked to write "on demand." This suggests that Vermont's "process-based" approach to writing instruction is also working well.

The directions for the Uniform Assessment encouraged students to use the prewriting and editing techniques that, over the past 15 years, have become a basic part of writing instruction in many Vermont schools. In these schools, students are encouraged to develop their writing assigments through an open-ended, creative process, rather than by making an outline and following it strictly. That the eighth grade performance was strong on all three parts of the assessment — across-the-curriculum (Portfolio), personal-best (Best Piece) and on-demand writing (Uniform Assessment) — seems to demonstrate that by this grade, most students are comfortable with the process approach to writing, and can employ it to meet a variety of challenges.

Fourth Grade Assessments

Fourth graders generally performed best on the Best Piece, where 38-58 percent scored above the midpoint; they did least well on the Portfolio, where 25-45 percent scored above the midpoint.

The graphs on pages 9-10 show that fourth graders are strong in Purpose (47 percent above midpoint), and in Usage/Mechanics/Grammar (52 percent above midpoint). They appear weaker in Details (31 percent above midpoint), and in Voice/Tone (32 percent above midpoint), with Organization (42 percent above midpoint) falling between the two extremes.

The primary reason for the weaker showing in Details and Voice/Tone may be developmental: Some fourth graders may not yet be ready to use details effectively, or to project a strong, individual voice. Perhaps teaching strategies should adjust to nurture these aspects of writing — but we leave it to teachers, who know their students best, to draw final conclusions.

It is probably an excellent sign that the Best Piece assessments are generally the highest in this grade. Here, presumably, students followed the writing process most closely — and when students are given a chance to "brainstorm," to "conference," to develop multiple drafts, edit and revise, they perform best.

Eighth Grade Assessments

Eighth graders did best in the Uniform Assessment, where 63-77 percent were assessed above the midpoint in the five categories. The weakest assessments came in Portfolio, with 44-57 percent assessed above the midpoint.

Within the categories, eighth graders, like fourth graders, performed best in Purpose (67 percent above midpoint) and Usage/Mechanics/Grammar (62 percent above). Organization skills (62 percent above midpoint) have risen sharply, at this level. Details (57 percent above) and Voice/Tone (55 percent above) are again the lowest-assessed dimensions, though they are dramatically higher than the fourth grade results.

Vermont's eighth graders appear to have the most difficulty with Details in both the Portfolio, where 34 percent were assessed below the midpoint, and in the Best Piece, where 23 percent were below midpoint. This may suggest that use of details is an area on which to focus in teaching.

This across-the-board improvement in skills between grades 4 and 8 suggests strongly that Vermont's writing program is effective.

That the grade eight Uniform Assessment findings are highest of all seems, again, to say that students at this level have made the writing process part of their "working equipment," ready to use effectively, on demand. Teachers should be encouraged and gratified by this — and, in general, by all these findings.

The pilot-year writing results tell us that we are on our way to meeting an important indicator of Vermont's Education Goal 1: that "effective communication through reading, writing, speaking and listening" helps us to "see to it that every child becomes a competent, caring, productive, responsible individual and citizen who is committed to continued learning throughout life."

V. Illuminations: Some Findings of the Questionnaire

Before beginning the Uniform Assessment writing task, students in both grades were asked to respond to 12 "General Information Questions," which were designed to extend and amplify the findings of the writing assessment.

The questions asked, for example, "How much television do you usually watch each day?", and "How often do you read for your own enjoyment?" Several questions sought information on students' writing in school: for example, "In how many subjects do you regularly receive writing assignments?"

The project's consultants, Advanced Systems, correlated the students' responses to levels of writing performance. The resulting information is lengthy and complex — but it illuminates a number of important issues.

The correlations give us data on the relationship of students' writing skills to their parents' level of education — an important issue from the standpoint of educational equity. They demonstrate the negative impact of television, and the positive impact of reading; and they lend real support to the effectiveness of writing across the curriculum, and of teaching writing as a process.

This section summarizes the findings in seven especially useful areas, drawn from the grade eight results:

• **Are you a boy or a girl?** The responses to this first question showed that eighth grade girls are writing more effectively than boys. Sixty-seven percent of the girls who answered the questionnaire averaged an upper-range performance in their assessments. On average, 52 percent of the boys were assessed in the upper range, "Frequently" through "Extensively."

• **What is the highest education level reached by your parents?** The survey results suggest that parental education has an effect on students' writing progress. Because our goal is equal progress for all, these are findings that should be noted:

Parents did not finish high school: 31 percent assessed in upper range.

Parents graduated from high school: 50 percent assessed in upper range.

Parents had some education after high school: 60 percent assessed in upper range.

Parents graduated from college: 70 percent assessed in upper range.

• **How much television do you usually watch each day?** The findings here are striking:

None: 71 percent assessed in upper range.

One hour or less: 68 percent assessed in upper range.

Two hours: 61 percent assessed in upper range.

Three hours: 57 percent assessed in upper range.

Four hours or more: 52 percent assessed in upper range.

• **How often do you read for your own enjoyment?** Again, the results are dramatic:

At least once a week: 65 percent assessed in upper range.

About once or twice a month: 59 percent assessed in upper range.

About once every few months: 52 percent assessed in upper range.

About once a year or less often: 37 percent assessed in upper range.

The correlations...demonstrate the negative impact of television, and the positive impact of reading; and they lend real support to the effectiveness of writing across the curriculum.

• **In how many subjects do you regularly receive writing assignments of at least a paragraph in length? (Count English/reading/language arts as one subject.)** These findings present one argument for writing across the curriculum:

One subject: 55 percent assessed in upper range.

Two subjects: 58 percent assessed in upper range.

Three or more subjects: 64 percent assessed in upper range.

• **How often do you jot down ideas, make notes, or make an outline about the topic of a paper before you write it?** Evidence, here, for the effectiveness of prewriting:

Usually: 65 percent assessed in upper range.

Sometimes: 60 percent assessed in upper range.

Never: 53 percent assessed in upper range.

• **How often do you edit or revise your writing before you turn it in to your teacher?**

Usually: 67 percent assessed in upper range.

Sometimes: 51 percent assessed in upper range.

Never: 33 percent assessed in upper range.

VI. Assessing the Assessment: "I've Been Meaning to Tell You — It Hasn't Been That Bad!"

Vermont's writing assessment pilot year involved four distinct groups: the Writing Assessment Leadership Committee; writing resource consultants; the benchmarking committees; and teachers, along with their students, from the sample schools.

The Leadership Committee devised guidelines and suggested minimum contents for the writing portfolios. Resource consultants, most of them teachers themselves, offered workshops and professional-development sessions in writing and the development of portfolios. Benchmarking committees, composed of resource consultants from the appropriate grade levels, reviewed fourth and eighth grade writing portfolios in search of pieces that would demonstrate the four levels of accomplishment for each of the five criteria. Teachers and students responded to the suggestions of the various planning groups, and themselves suggested important refinements in the program.

If any single group deserves special acknowledgment in the report, it is the students and teachers in the sample schools. They were bombarded with guidelines and criteria, asked to respond, then bombarded with revisions in this experimental year. The teachers were also asked to attend meetings, sometimes on short notice, that took them from their classrooms more often than they might have liked.

Also deserving of special mention are the school principals and superintendents who supported this program by releasing resource consultants and members of the Leadership Committee more often than they might otherwise have felt was prudent. This pilot year was an intensive experience, requiring every bit of expertise we could find.

What seems most remarkable, after such an ambitious year, is that morale seemed to build as the year progressed. The clearer the program's goals and expectations became, the greater the suppor. it received from Vermont's teachers and student writers. During the final phase of the pilot year, as teachers from the sample schools were participating in a marathon, two-day assessment of student portfolios, one teacher was heard to say to a staff member of the Department of Education: "I've been meaning to tell you — it hasn't been that bad!"

Thoughts from the 'Table Leaders'

Here are some general responses, from the resource consultants who served as "table leaders" at the portfolio assessment sessions, to the writing portfolios they helped to assess:

"I think that I can speak for Table 6 in saying that, despite the work load, this was an invigorating and inspiring couple of days. A few things impressed me: the uniformity of the grading; the joy of discovering various 'nuggets' of good stuff; the variety and the quality of eighth grade writing."

"I was very impressed by the overall level of student excitement in the writing. It seemed that the classes where teachers took a lower profile had stronger student voices in the writing. Letters from the kids told the most about their relationship, inspiring and sometimes depressing, to the writing. I like how the portfolio committee became a new audience for some children. Some of the letters had a remarkably candid quality.

"Writing across the curriculum was evident throughout fourth and eighth grade portfolios. There were also some very innovative writing-reading connection papers. The whole process of working with the teacher/assessors was inspiring and fun."

"I was disappointed and elated by the portfolios. Some portfolios lacked writing samples, as simple as that. There were also too many assignments designed by teachers that did not give students the opportunity to discover their purpose for writing or find their voice.

"The experience confirmed the prevailing sense among the writing community that language can be the close, personal ally of every self, regardless of ability, age, or station. The teachers who know this, and can make it a reality for their students, are doing immeasurably important work."

"Some content area pieces were outstanding. I especially enjoyed a science experiment that involved observing an animal over a period of weeks and recording impressions in a daily journal. My concern is that many content area pieces were transcribed from textbooks, encyclopedias, etc. It is an area of concern that teachers must address.

"One group of portfolios was outstanding. The students obviously understood that writing is a process and were in control of their own process. Students showed improvement over the year. Students were taught about organization, applied what they had learned, and demonstrated competency. Teacher input into the process contributed without interfering. Students' voice was evident throughout. As one member of our group commented, 'Just tell her, we loved them!'"

"A full range from hesitant and constrained to fluent and lyrical. In schools where students were encouraged to choose their own topics, the writing was much more powerful and the range of writing much broader.

"A lot of poetry! Too much of it rhymed! A lot of very prescriptive assignments. I mean not only the assignment outlined, but the form, sentence by sentence, of the assignment outlined. Barf. I personally am never again going to assign something I don't feel like reading. That's probably a lie."

"As I read the portfolios I thought about the great writers that we already have. I admired the writers and their efforts to give their teachers the writings that the teachers wanted. Some of the prompts were deadly.

"Some of my observations are: teachers need to 'let go' of

their students' writings — this is very hard...in many ways it's like letting go of your own children as they grow through the teenage years; the students need to own their portfolios. The portfolios should not be the domain of the classroom teacher.

"Teachers need to talk to teachers about what they do. Teachers need to write along with their students and share their writings with their students. They need to give their students the freedom to write whatever students need to write about. We should be there to let it happen. Feelings are neither right nor wrong — they just happen."

"How portfolios are compiled — I've heard people say: in some classes students had complete control; in others, teachers and students conferred on the contents of the portfolio; in still others, teachers were quite directive in what went into the portfolio.

"Some portfolios had many pieces, 15 to 30; some had very few. Thus, a 'Sometimes' in one is not the same as a 'Sometimes' in the other.

"In some groups of portfolios, the writing was very tightly controlled by the assignment. Thus, the purpose was the teacher's. In other groups, the writing was varied, open, and trusting. These portfolios had much stronger voice. The students took risks, explored feelings. The gap in the two approaches was significant.

"Some groups of portfolios had writing from other disciplines, writing that showed the other disciplines valued writing as well as their curriculum.

"What do I conclude? The writing I saw varied widely from school to school. What was most useful about this process was that teachers from all over the state saw the variety and talked about it."

"I learned a hell of a lot. The experience confirmed the prevailing sense among the writing community that language can be the close, personal ally of every self, regardless of ability, age, or station. The teachers who know this, and can make it a reality for their students, are doing immeasurably important work."

"Wow! Really so many incredible aspects. Many teachers made comments about all they had learned.

"It is very important to get the program survey in place so that we can balance the 'final product assessment' with a look at process, revision, variety, progress over time, writing across the curriculum, etc. I think it is so important that teachers and schools receive commendations and suggestions, which I believe can be more substantially generated through the program survey.

"Perhaps we need to consider a minimum contents for the portfolio, since it was difficult and, in some cases, impossible to assess portfolios with only two pieces, or pieces of one type. And we need to provide guideline possibilities for organizing the portfolio.

"Supporting each other and our schools in the following areas is essential:

"Development of voice through exemplars and discussion — particularly in research reports;

"Helping teachers let go — building a writing community in the classroom — less directed writing — more freedom of choice;

"Stronger connections between literature and writing;

"Promoting risk-taking on the part of the student;

"Including the student in a self-assessment — communicating criteria to students;

"Ways to promote self-reflection — particularly through learning logs or journals in the content areas.

"A lot of good writing is going on. With a 'common' language perhaps we can create connections to support all teachers of writing.

"But what concerns me most is where we go from here. How will this assessment now drive instruction? Do we leave it solely up to the teacher to now ask for help in areas of deficiency? Clearly some teachers are teaching writing in creative and fresh ways. Others need workshops desperately. Let's tap into this group of teachers to help others get the program going next year. More workshops, more dialogue, more communication, more refining of criteria, and more people — students, administrators, school board members — involved."

"I wish we could have assessed the writing of all students. Still, a marvelous learning/teaching experience. It gives me energy and hope."

Appendix

The Vermont Writing Assessment Leadership Committee

Andrea Alsup, *Woodstock Union High School*
Beverly Barton, *Hartford Memorial Middle School*
Susan Biggam, *Vermont Department of Education*
John Catalini, *Brattleboro Union High School*
Angelo Dorta, *Founders Memorial School*
Geof Hewitt, *Vermont Department of Education*
Shayne Lylis, *Rutland South Supervisory Union*
Sheila Mable, *South Burlington High School*
Joan Simmons, *Craftsbury Academy*

Sample Schools for the 1990-91 Portfolio Pilot

Arlington School
St. Johnsbury Middle School
Berkshire Elementary School
Bakersfield Elementary School
Wolcott Elementary School
Hazen Union School District
Lakeview School
North Country Junior High School
Lawrence Barnes School
Edmunds Middle School
Lamoille Union High School
Moretown Elementary School
Warren Elementary School
Harwood Union High School
Founders Memorial School
St. Albans Town Central School
Essex Middle School
Shelburne Middle School
South Burlington Orchard School
South Burlington Middle School
Stowe Elementary School
Stowe Jr/Sr High School
Robinson School
Mt. Abraham Union High School
Sudbury Country School
Lothrop School
Otter Valley Union High School
Newton Elementary School
Bennington Elementary School
Mt. Anthony Junior High School
Braintree Lower Branch School
Brookfield Elementary School
Randolph Union High School
Westminster Center School
Bellows Falls Middle School
Bethel Elementary School
Whitcomb Jr/Sr High School
Chester-Andover School
Green Mountain Union High School
Addison Central School
Vergennes Union High School
Black River Union High School
Woodstock Elementary School
Woodstock Junior High School
Rutland Lincoln School
Rutland Junior High School

Volunteer Schools in the 1990-91 Portfolio Pilot

Waitsfield Elementary School
Worcester Village School
Sherburne Elementary School
Roxbury Village School
Northfield Jr/Sr High School
Alburg Community Educational Center
Hiawatha School
Marlboro Elementary School
Charlotte Central School
Brewster-Pierce School
Hardwick Elementary School
Fisher School
Bridport Central School
Wilmington High School
Whitingham School
Mary Hogan School
Georgia Elementary School
Concord Graded/High School
West Fairlee
North Country Jr. UHSD
Underhill Central School
Lyndon Town School District
Morristown Elementary School
Green Mountain Union High School
Stamford Elementary School
Miller's Run School
Randolph School District
Camel's Hump Middle School
Randolph Union High School
Thomas Fleming Elementary School
Summit Street School
Deerfield Valley Elementary School
Academy School
Green Street School
Oak Grove School
Folsom Educational Center
Hinesburg Elementary School
Main Street Middle School
Wallingford Elementary School
Marion Cross School
Shrewsbury Mountain School
Clarendon Elementary School
Shaftsbury Elementary School
Browns River Middle School
Mill River Union High School
Enosburg Elementary School
Enosburg Falls High School
Grand Isle Supervisory Union
Montgomery Elementary School
Highgate Elementary School
Chamberlin Elementary School
South Burlington Central School
St. Albans Town Central School
J.P. Callaghan Memorial School
Fairfield Center School
North Country Jr. UHSD
Chelsea Public School
Milton Graded School
Northfield Elementary School
Craftsbury Schools
Union Elementary School
Spaulding Middle School
Manchester Elementary School
Peacham School
Abraham Lincoln Elementary
Cabot School
Swanton Schools
Ward Five School
Bellows Falls Middle School
Whitingham School
Berkshire Elementary School
East Montpelier Elementary School
Winooski High School
Rumney School
Lunenburg Village School
Lamoille Union High School
Lakeview Union Elementary School
J.F. Kennedy School
Hartland Elementary School
Gilman Middle School
Hyde Park Elementary School
Otter Valley High School
Wheeler School
Fayston School
Calais Elementary School
Berlin Elementary School
Waterford Elementary School
Westminster Center School
Union 32 High School
Robinson School
Ripton Hollow Elementary School
Orange Center School
North Hero Elementary School
Milton Jr/Sr High School
Isle LaMotte Elementary School
Mt. Abraham Union High School
Salisbury Village School
Underhill ID School

Writing Resource Centers for 1991-92

Union High School
Camel's Hump Middle School
Lyndon Town School
Manchester Elementary School
Otter Valley Union High School
Woodstock Union High School

Vermont Writing Resource Consultants

(professional development and in-service workshops)

Andrea Alsup	*Woodstock Union High School*
Peter Anderson	*Marion Cross School*
Beverly Barton	*Hartford Memorial Middle School*
David Book	*Cabot School*
Shirley Burroughs	*Woodstock Elementary School*
Kathleen Carey	*Sherburne Elementary School*
Marion Cassano	*Sherburne Elementary School*
Margaret Cassidy	*Brattleboro Union High School*
John Catalini	*Brattleboro Union High School*
James DeFilippi	*Winooski High School*
Angelo Dorta	*Founders Memorial School*
Paul Eschholz	*UVM*
Toby Fulwiler	*UVM*
Andrew Green	*Self-employed writer, Bristol*
Hasse Halley	*Jericho*
Patricia Halloran	*Waterbury Elementary School*
Larry Henikoff	*Winooski High School*
Nioka Houston	*Wolcott Elementary School*
Gordon Korstange	*Green Mountain High School*
Barry Lane	*Discover Writing, Shoreham*
Kathryn Larsen	*Deerfield Valley Elementary School*
Michael Livingston	*Marion Cross High School*
Shayne Lylis	*Rutland South Supervisory Union*
Sheila Mable	*South Burlington High School*
Patricia McGonegal	*Camel's Hump Middle School*
Ferguson McKay	*Lyndon State College*
Donna Merkle	*Mary Hogan School*
James Mosenthal	*UVM*
Nancy Olson	*Brattleboro Union High School*
John Poeton	*Education Consultant, Barre*
Peter Rodis	*Dartmouth College*
Joyce Roof	*Woodstock Union High School*
Cynthia Russell	*Green Mountain Power*
Joan Simmons	*Craftsbury Academy*
Stephanie Stockwell	*Woodstock Elementary School*
Amelia Stone	*Brattleboro Jr. High School*
Marion Stone	*Fisher High School*
Joyce Sullivan	*Windham Southeast Supervisory Union*
Ellen Thompson	*Colchester School District*
Anne Watson	*Winooski School District*
Norma Wiesen	*Hazen Union School*
Joan Wise	*Sherburne Elementary School*
Sigourney Wright	*Manchester Elementary School*

General Information Questions

Record your answer choices for the General Information Questions in the Questionnaire spaces provided on page 1 of your writing booklet. Mark only one answer for each question. This General Information Section contains 12 questions.

1. Are you a
   1. boy?
   2. girl?

2. How often were you absent from school this year?
   1. never
   2. 1 to 10 days
   3. 11 to 20 days
   4. more than 20 days.

3. What is the highest education level reached by your parents? (Mark only one answer — the level for your parent who had the most education.)
   1. did not finish high school
   2. graduated from high school
   3. had some education after high school (for example, business or technical school)
   4. graduated from college
   5. I don't know.

4. How much television do you usually watch each day?
   1. none
   2. 1 hour or less
   3. 2 hours
   4. 3 hours
   5. 4 hours or more.

5. How often do you read for your own enjoyment?
   1. at least once a week
   2. about once or twice a month
   3. about once every few months
   4. about once a year or less often.

6. Assigned writing counts as part of my grade in
   1. English class only.
   2. English class and one other class.
   3. English class and two other classes.
   4. English class and three or more other classes.

7. In how many subjects do you regularly receive writing assignments of at least a paragraph in length? (Count English/reading/language arts as one subject.)
   1. one subject
   2. two subjects
   3. three or more subjects

8. Approximately how much in-school time do you spend writing per week?
   1. less than 45 minutes
   2. about an hour
   3. 1½ to 2 hours
   4. 2½ hours or more.

9. How often do you jot down ideas, make notes, or make an outline about the topic of a paper before you write it?
   1. usually
   2. sometimes
   3. never
   4. I haven't written any papers.

10. How often do you edit or revise your writing before you turn it in to your teacher?
    1. usually
    2. sometimes
    3. never
    4. I haven't written any papers.

11. If you have a computer at home, how do you mainly use it?
    1. I do not have a computer at home.
    2. I mainly use it for games.
    3. I mainly use it for homework (writing papers, etc.).
    4. I mainly use it for other things.

12. How often do you use a calculator in math class?
    1. never
    2. a few times a year
    3. a few times a month
    4. a few times a week.

Vermont Uniform Writing Assessment

Directions

You will have 90 minutes to work on a paper that tells about an experience you had in the past. Read the writing task in the box below and then think about the prewriting suggestions.

Writing Task

Most people have strong feelings about something that happened to them in the past. Think about a time when you felt happy, scared, surprised, or proud.

Tell about this time so that the reader will understand what happened, who was involved, how the experience made you feel, and why it was important to you.

Prewriting Suggestions

1. Think about some of the times when you felt happy, scared, surprised, or proud.
2. Which one of these times do you have the **strongest** feeling about?
3. When did this experience take place?
4. Where did this experience take place?
5. Who were some of the people involved?
6. How did this experience make you feel?
7. Think about specific details that show why this experience was important. Remember to include enough details so that the reader can share your feelings with you.

You may use this information as part of your rough draft to assist you in mapping, outlining, or organizing in any other way. If you need extra paper for your rough draft, raise your hand and your teacher will provide it for you. You may use a dictionary or thesaurus while you are working on your rough draft and your final draft of this paper.

Editing Suggestions

When you finish your rough draft, ask yourself the following questions and then make any changes that you think are needed.

1. Is my paper clearly written?
2. Are my ideas well-organized?
3. Have I included enough specific details so that the reader understands what the experience was and who was involved?
4. Have I included enough specific details so that the reader understands how this experience made me feel and why it was important to me?
5. Does my writing show my own voice and personal expression?
6. Have I chosen the best words to express my ideas?
7. Are my sentences clear and complete?
8. Are my spelling, capitalization, and punctuation correct?

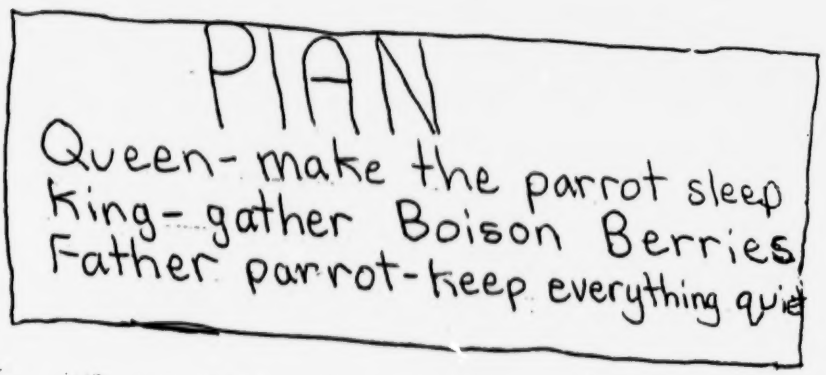
Remember that you may use a dictionary or thesaurus as you revise and edit your rough draft.

When you have finished your rough draft and are satisfied with it, copy your final draft in the writing booklet.

So the animals of the forest planned a surprise party for the king, Queen, and for Boison Berry because the baby prince could talk! Everyone in the forest cared and loved the prince for the rest of his life.

Vermont Department of Education
120 State Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05620

The father of the parrots decided to write the plan on paper and this is what it looked like.



So after the father of the parrot family explained his plan everyone did what the plan said they had to do. When everyone had done what they were supposed to do. The father of the parrots gave a berry to the Queen and the Queen put the berry into the baby parrots mouth and the first thing that happened was that the parrot woke up. The next thing that happend was that the parrot said his first word which was Boison Berry. So the king and Queen named their baby parrot Boison Berry and within a week he was taking like his mom and dad.

"The Parrot That Couldn't Talk" was written by Marissa Wilkens, a fourth grader at Enosburg Elementary School. It is reprinted by permission.

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